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ABSTRACT

This is one of a series of reports based on an ongoing reality test of systemic evaluation for instructional decision making. This feasibility study is being carried out by the Center for the Study of Evaluation with the Laboratory in School and Community Relations at a suburban Los Angeles high school (called Site A). Viewing a school as a cultural/ecological system, systemic evaluation is a set of principles to guide local development of processes to gather, organize, and utilize information relevant to the needs and values of the system and its members. This paper discusses four key social contextual issues that emerged during the early phases of the Site A project: (1) the current status of the school's Computerized Accountability for Student Achievement (CASA) information management system for counseling and administrative staff; (2) teachers' clinical perspective on information and features of the school's social organization; (3) faculty-district relations as they impinge on the systemic evaluation development; and (4) the nature of the school district's support for the project and what it portends for the future. (BS)

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Contextual Influences in Developing a School-Based Comprehensive Information System

Donald W. Dorr-Bremme

TM 850 002

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Contextual Influences in
Developing a School-Based Comprehensive Information System

Donald W. Dorr-Bremme

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to identify and examine some social contextual factors that impinge upon a school's development of on-going, systemic evaluation for instructional decision making. The data for this analysis come from the case study of a "reality test" of such a system now under way in a suburban, California high school.

The paper begins with a brief description of the school district and school in which this effort is being conducted, a succinct review of the model of systemic evaluation being tested there, and an outline of the reality test itself. It then describes and documents several social phenomena that contextualize this effort and goes on to suggest how each appears to influence the school's response to systemic evaluation.

All this should be construed as a progress report, rather than a list of findings. The reality test (or feasibility study) has been in progress one year and has another year yet to run. Nevertheless, both experience and related research suggest that the issues identified thus far in the project are important ones and that they tend to arise in many school districts which are engaged in efforts to develop instructional information systems.

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The Setting

The reality test of systemic evaluation is being conducted at Site A in the Valley Unified District* on the fringe of the Los

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* A pseudonym

Angeles metropolitan area. The District serves an enrollment of about 25,000 students, who come from a socioeconomically diverse community.

Site A is one of two high schools in the District. Among its 2,000 or so students, approximately 85 percent are "Anglo"; the rest are Hispanic, Asian, and Black. School authorities estimate that 8 to 10 percent of Site A's graduating seniors go on to attend four-year colleges or universities, another 20 to 30 percent attend a local community college.

The school prides itself on offering a full range of advanced placement courses, a rich curriculum, successful athletic programs, and a wide range of other extracurricular activities. Educators at Site A and in the District, however, express some concern that Site A graduates may not be pursuing post-secondary educational and career opportunities concomitant with the quality of school programs.

While in most ways neither Site A or the Valley Districtare unusual, some special resources and programs make them propitious settings for a trial of the systemic evaluation concept.

One distinctive feature of the resources at Site A is the presence of a computerized individual information system. CASA (Computerized Accountability for Student Achievement) is a computer-based student information management system which provides counseling staff and assistant principals instantaneous access to a wealth of information stored on each student. Through this system, counseling staff and adminstrators can access such student-level information as standardized test scores for multiple years (including information prior to entry to high school); proficiency testing information (from the District's Computer Managed Instruction program,

which monitors student progress in Grades K-10 through the use of CRT's based on District continuum); curriculum and performance information including courses taken, credits, grades and class rank; background information including parental occupations, family size, census tract location of residence, and ethnicity; current school status information including eligibility for special programs (Gifted and Talented, Bilingual, Special Education) special school activities (athletics, school paper, etc.), complete attendance history and referrals to various school services (psychologist, health office counselor and guidance office, principal, etc.).

The CASA system was developed with Title IV-C funds. The system is currently being augmented through state school improvement funds targeted to the development of a computer-managed Career Magnet School (CMS) program. CMS seeks to align student career interests with competencies with specific courses at Site A in which they may be obtained. Over the past year, teams of teachers have been developing the list of skills associated with given courses in the school and an analogous list required for each career program. (Careers Magnet schools are first broken down into career paths such as computer technology and then further into programs such as computer technician, operator, programmer, or designer). The skill-to-course and skill-to-career matches are being computerized so that counseling staff can develop courses of study for students choosing particular careers and monitor their progress at obtaining prerequisite skills.

CMS is one of two efforts recently instituted at Site A that are directed at career and academic decision making. The other, the Learning Resources Center (LRC), offers students and teachers academic

resources (materials, assistance) for remedial and advanced work. These two programs appear to be guided by a general concern that students do not have the necessary information and skills to attain post-secondary education and careers they might want. The implicit assumption is that by providing students with more information about career opportunities and their necessary prerequisites (CMS) on the one hand, and resources for remediating or enhancing their academic performance (LRC), on the other, that students will make better decisions about how to benefit from their high school experience and be better prepared for their future.

Thus, Site A in the Valley Unified School District offers a setting with a wealth of relevant information already on file and a sophisticated system already in place to make that data accessible to at least some Site A personnel. It is a setting in which a few key figures had, before the advent of the current project, a keen interest in information for decision making. With these advantages, project staff have reasoned, if systemic evaluation cannot become viable in a setting with these advantages, it probably cannot become viable anywhere.

Aside from its promising technology, however, Site A and its district provide a typical suburban setting. There is reason to believe, therefore, that the kinds of issues, concerns, and enthusiasms that surface during the reality test here will be generic ones -- germane to circumstances in many other schools and districts.

The Systemic Evaluation Model

The model or conceptualization of "systemic evaluation" that is in trial at Site A has been outlined by Sirotnik, Burstein, and Thomas (1983). Among its key assumptions or features are the following:

1. Outcome indices have limited value, beyond their immediate descriptive signal, for helping direct an agenda for school improvement.

2. A necessary requisite is relevant information on the circumstances, activities and sentiments associated with schooling process.

3. The criteria of relevance are based upon the perceived needs of the significant "actors" in the setting (e.g., administrators, teachers, students, parents) and the inherent value systems through which these perceptions are filtered.

4. Information gathering as knowledge production has several crucial and interrelated features:

   a. It is operationalized with a multi-method approach to data collection (e.g., survey questionaire, interview, anecdotal and structured observation, document and archival records).

   b. It is conceptualized and analyzed from a multi-level (e.g., individual class, school, district) perspective.

   c. It embraces multi-inquiry paradigms (e.g., empirical analytic, naturalistic/interpretive and critical-dialectic).

5. Information as knowledge is not an end in itself but is, instead, a catalyst for evaluative discourse and action; systemic evaluation must, therefore, be legitimized as a natural and on-going part of the daily work life of those for whom the knowledge is to be relevant.

Underlying these principles is a view of the school as a cultural/ecological system. Renewal of that system comes about ideally, the model suggests, through:

> a process by which the circumstances, activities, and meanings [of the school as a system] come to be understood and acted upon by people to whom it is relevant... [the renewl process] is people actively and continuously engaged in the systemic and rigorous deliberation over any and all

> information seen to be potentially relevant to school improvement (Sirotnik, Burstein, & Thomas, 1983, p. 35).

As all the foregoing should indicate, the model or conceptualization is not a blueprint or recipe for what to do, but a set of principles that can guide local developmental efforts. Thus, the "reality test," or feasibility study, was undertaken to learn what happens when educators in a school environment actually attempt to follow those principles toward development of sytemic evaluation.

The Reality Test to Date

The systemic evaluation field test is being carried out by the Center for the Study of Evaluation in collaboration with the Laboratory in School and Community Relations, both of UCLA.

While examining the viability of the systemic evaluation concept is the broad goal of reality testing at Site A, there are more specific objectives as well. In particular, the project strives to explore and work toward resolving methodological issues that arise. In view of the nature of the model, two types of methodological issues are of central interest. One type can be called technical; the other, social.

Technical issues include problems, concerns, and solution strategies that arise in developing methods to generate multi-method, multi-level data; to integrate that data technologically (e.g., in computer files) such that it can address locally relevant concerns; and to display that data in ways that different user groups find understandable and utilizable. (A paper that accompanies this one addresses some of the technical issues that have emerged so far).

Social issues include the problems, concerns, and solution strategies that surface in developing social organizational arrangements -- arrangements for identifying "significant actors" in the setting; structures through which these actors can articulate their information needs and viewpoints on the formatting of information; forums and procedures that facilitate consultation and use of the information; and arrangements for maintaining the entire evaluation-and-renewal system.

By identifying and beginning to work through these issues during the field test, project staff hope to gain information that can help other schools and school districts develop their own versions of systemic evaluation more smoothly and efficiently.

To date, CSE project staff have worked closely with school and district personnel to carry through the initial stages of this reality test. A working group including the Site A principal, other school administrators, and a five teachers has met regularly with project staff. During the course of these meetings, Site A personnel have begun to articulate their information interests and needs, to shape and revise a survey of student perceptions and attitudes, and to specify ways in which the student survey data and other information already in district files can be integrated and displayed for maximum utility. Three reporting formats have evolved. A "Student-At-A-Glance" form (including survey data, grade point average, attendance and test-score data on each learner) has been designed to accompany the class list each teacher receives at the beginning of a semester.

A "Class-At-A-Glance" form for each class provides graphic summaries of each class' perferences among different types of learning activities, as well as their overall feelings about the class subject. Finally, a "School-At-A-Glance" form highlights in graphs and prose a set of issues that the working group deems worthy of consideration by the entire faculty and staff.

At the district level, project staff have examined the current district information files and have begun to develop (with district data-processing staff) ways of integrating the data in those files with the new survey data. Negotiations among project staff, district administrators, data processing personnel, and the school principal have been aimed at securing continued district support for the reality test effort and for its maintenance when the field test ends. District officials have reaffirmed commitment to the project, and they have become increasingly interested in its data-integration and data-reporting dimensions.

At present, the project has several immediate goals. One is to refine the "At-A-Glance" forms and present them to all school faculty with actual data for their classes. A second goal is to present issues summarized in the "School-At-A-Glance" report to the entire faculty and staff in a forum which allows for their initial discussion. A third goal is to complete revisions of a teacher survey form, administer it to the whole school faculty, and integrate those data with information from the student survey and extant district information in ways that school staff believe will be helpful. These goals will entail continued cooperation with the District office, especially the District's data processing group.

And as these steps unfold, project staff will gather new insights into the technical and social methods that can facilitate the realization of systemic evaluation.

Throughout the project, one staff member has been documenting the course of event -- contextual features, trends in thinking, meeting-by-meeting discussions, etc. -- in a nearly verbatim way. The 600 pages or so of field notes collected this far have allowed UCLA staff to reflect on the direction of events over time. Ultimately, this case study will provide a record of what has been learned.

The project also gains perspective on events in the field-test setting through recurrent meetings with another CSE effort (the Management of Instructional Information Systems, or MIIS, project), which has been studying and continues to investigate information systems in other school districts.

This brief sketch of the reality test to date provides background for the description and discussion of some key contextual issues that have emerged so far. As that discussion proceeds, there will be references to and elaboration upon this outline of past and present activities.

ISSUES AND OBSERVATIONS

Four general features of the district and school context are described below, together with their implications for the development of a comprehensive information system at Site A. These are (1) the current status of the extant district-school information system;

(2) Site A teachers' clinical perspective on information and the features of school social organization that support that perspective; (3) faculty-District relations as they impinge on the development of systemic evaluation; and (4) the nature of District support for the Site A - UCLA project. While these topics are treated separately in the pages below, it will soon become clear that the phenomena discussed under each heading are quite interdependent.

The Current Status of the Valley-Site A Information System

As noted above, Site A has and is continuing to develop a computerized student-information management system. Referred to as CASA (Computerized Accountability for Student Achievement), this system was in place before the systemic evaluation reality test began. One might imagine, then, that CASA served to break ground for the development of systemic evaluation at Site A: that it familiarized Site A staff members with the advantages of easily accessible information for instructional planning and decision making; that it generated enthusiasm for and sophistication about information systems and their use; or that it led to technological and organizational procedures, upon which systemic evaluation could build, for accessing and using information. In fact, however, the presence of CASA has had little discernible impact to date on Site A's progress toward comprehensive, systemic evaluation. A brief review of CASA's history and current status reveals why; it also underscores some of the conditions necessary for instructional information systems to be useful and utilized.

Like many educational information systems (Bank & Williams, 1982), CASA emerged from the interest and enthusiasm of a very small group. One Site A assistant principal championed the idea of accessing the District's huge data base for instructional planning at the school level. She took the initiative in CASA's creation. Later, as the Career Magnet School (CMS) concept evolved, this same administrator saw CASA's potential for facilitating it. Together with the Site A improvement program (SIP) coordinator, she wrote the plans that secured state SIP funds for linking CASA with CMS. (Refer to page 4 above for details.) A few others in the high school's central office, counselors and administrators, offered their support and suggestions as the present CASA system was developed. Evidence suggests that no faculty members were involved.

Thus, CASA was in no sense a response to a schoolwide interest in instructional information systems, in no sense a product of schoolwide demand for better or more easily accessible information about students. Among Site A's faculty and staff in general, no such interest or demand was expressed. Furthermore, with one exception, the few central office personnel who promoted and developed CASA did not seem to think of it as a schoolwide innovation. Certainly, there was no schoolwide planning to inform its design.

As it was originally intended to be, CASA has been used primarily by counselors and assistant principals. They draw upon it as they advise students on academic and career paths and as they handle referrals of students with individual problems.

CASA is also available to classroom teachers. Any member of the faculty can go at any time to the central office, where one of the school's administrative assistants has been designated to process their CASA requests. Through her, they can obtain information on individual students or class groups in any of a wide variety of standard report formats. (For a list of some of the data available through CASA, see page 4 above.) Nevertheless, all the evidence available reveals that very few teachers have made use of this opportunity. The following excerpts from the project's case study field notes document, and suggest some of the reasons for this phenomenon.

NOTE #1 (February 22, 1984). The first working-group meeting of the new project year is under way. Five teachers, an assistant principal, the school improvement coordinator, and the administrative assistant who coordinates CASA requests are present, together with the UCLA staff. Discussion has been following the first three items on the agenda prepared for the session by UCLA: "(1) Identify the kinds of information teachers, counselors, and building administrators view to be useful for their work... (2) Identify what specific problems (at any level) Site A staff would expect the information system to help them address; (3) Ascertain level of understanding of the computerized information currently available to the school staff..." The teachers present have mentioned many kinds of information they feel would be beneficial to them: whether students in their classes have course prerequisites, students' past grades in their departments' courses, students' reading level, students' writing ability, and students' vocational goals. At this point, UCLA project co-director Leigh Burstein observes that nearly all this information is currently available to teachers on one of the standard CASA report forms known by the acronym ARF (Activities Referral Form). A foreign language teacher in the group responds, "I didn't know we could get that." Other Site A faculty in the group murmur their assent. Leigh Burstein describes the Activities Referral Form in more detail. The foreign language teacher asks, "Now why haven't we heard about that. That sounds very good." One or two other Site A staff members agree. A member of Site A's English Department replies, "I think we did hear something about that. Wasn't there -- I think there was, uh, a presentation in a faculty meeting last spring about it." Someone else from Site A adds, "Oh, I remember that!" The Math Department chairperson comments with a chuckle, "It certainly made a strong impression, didn't it?"

NOTE #2 (February 29, 1984) . The second working-group meeting is in progress with the same group members as in the first session a week earlier. The principal, however, is in attendance this time. Site A staff members in the working group have produced lists "for items to be printed on one sheet of information, to be distributed to teachers one time per semester (one sheet per class)," as one group member has labeled her list. The suggestions on each list, which represent group members' own ideas and those of colleagues with whom they have spoken during the past week, are now under discussion. As the foreign language teacher finishes presenting her suggestions, the following exchange ensues:

Health Teacher: "It seems to me, um, isn't this just computerizing the cum. folder and information card?"

Math Department Chairperson: "Well, it seems to me part of the problem is that all the information people want isn't in one place. It's in several locations. This would bring it together."

Health Teacher: "Well I don't know that. I don't know where all this information is. I don't even know what questions to ask to get the information I want."

Math Dept. Chair: "You don't know whether to ask for an ARF or a RALPH or... (general laughter). I'm not sure I do, either.

Health Teacher: "That's it. That's it exactly."

Later on in the meeting, discussion again returns to the ARF, or Activities Referral Form. UCLA staff have distributed an example of one ARF to the group.

Leigh Burstein (UCLA): "So far ARF is holding up pretty well. this information, the information we've been talking about, is in there. But the display issue will show up, because you want lots of information and it's not going to be easy to get it all clearly on one page."

Ken Sirotnik (UCLA): "This format [holding up the ARF] is too dense already. That may be why it isn't used."

Assistant Principal: "Well, it's quite new, too."

English Teacher: "No, he's right [holding up her copy of the ARF.] And it has to be in English. With all these numbers and codes, what have you -- it won't work like this."

Several others from Site A's staff nod and vocalize their assent.

NOTE #3 (May 23, 1984). A student survey developed by the systemic evaluation working group is about to be administered in classrooms throughout Site A. To prepare the way for this, UCLA staff are spending the day meeting with small groups of Site A faculty. During each period of the school day, those teachers with no assigned class meet with UCLA staff in a corner of the Learning Resource Center. There, Ken Sirotnik explains the history and purposes of the sytemic evaluation effort in general and the student survey in particular. He also answers teachers' questions, listens to their reactions, and outlines procedures for administering the student survey. Nearly every teacher in the school, plus some of the counselors and assistant principals, makes an appearance in one of the six sessions. In all but one of the six, there is considerable discussion and the exchanges are (in the jargon of international diplomacy) "frank."

Throughout the entire day, despite the fact that many of Sirotnik's remarks in each session could easily "cue" teachers' to think about CASA, only one teacher makes any reference to the CASA system, ARF, or any currently available information on students.

Ken Sirotnik (during Period 4, finishing his initial explanation of the project and the rationale behind the student survey): "So, we will report the information back to you, and we may do so in several different ways that you can use, depending on what your colleagues who are working with us suggest. But I guess before I go on, now would be a good time to talk about issues you want to raise, and to hear your comments."

Teacher: "You should know that we don't have a good record on getting information back. I was looking for correlations for my class on that [CASA] request form from [the administrative assistant who handles CASA requests]. I haven't gotten it yet. I think it's been over a week."

Sirotnik: "Well, there may have been problems there, and that's one of the things we're working to avoid..."

Teacher: "OK. I'm just pointing out that what we have is -- it's not accessible now."

These incidents strongly suggest that the CASA information system is neither well known now widely used among faculty at Site A. They give life and support to a comment dropped casually during the course of one meeting (with District personnel, on February 8, 1984) by the Site A administrative assistant who handles CASA requests. "We haven't been getting a lot of requests from teachers," she said. Indeed, the notes above suggest that this remark is something of an understatement.

Faculty members in the Site A-UCLA working group -- people who demonstrably have a special interest in information that can help them in their work, who care enough about obtaining such information to give their time to the project, and who volunteer that they would like to have some of the information now available in the CASA system -- could not recall even hearing about CASA's availability. In the course of meetings with small groups of teachers, meetings in which each time teachers heard a description of a project very similar to

CASA in some of its goals and paticular features, no one asked, "Don't we have something very similar to this?" or "How is what you're talking about different than what we can get now?" Surely they would have done so, amidst the frank discussion that occurred, if they were aware of CASA. Given many teachers' expressed concern with the time costs and ultimate value of "one more survey," this seems especially likely.* Finally, we have the administrative assistant's report (confirmed by District data processing personnel) that few teachers have called for CASA reports. All of this indicates why the presence of CASA has done little to pave the way for the development of systemic evaluation at Site A. CASA has, by and large, remained extrinsic to the professional lives of nearly all of Site A's faculty.

It is not difficult to account for this state of affairs. Pieces of an explanation are threaded through the brief history and field-note excerpts provided above.

First, and probably most importantly, nothing was done at Site A to build teachers' investment in CASA or to assure that CASA information and report formats responded to teachers' needs. There were, as we have seen, "good reasons" for this. CASA was not construed as a schoolwide organizational innovation. It was developed as a convenience, a technological short cut to facilitate central office and counseling functions. Teachers were told about it after the fact, rather than involved in its development. (Furthermore, within the flow of information that teachers constantly encounter in faculty meetings, this "telling" was evidentally not an especially salient event.) Thus, all the recent work on innovation and

dissemination in educational environments -- work captured in such buzz words as "stakeholders," "ownership," and "mutual adaptation" -- helps to explain why CASA has not "caught on" throughout Site A.

Second, there is evidence that the formal features of CASA (as opposed to its content) do not strike teachers as immediately appealing. Working-group members, viewing the ARF report apparently for the first time, found it unattractive and hard to read (Note #2 above). At least one teacher who requested CASA data found that he did not receive it promptly. Such shortcomings as these can be traced, at least in part, to the absence of faculty participation in CASA's development. They may also be factors in the limited teacher use of CASA.

A third factor, not addressed in this account so far, may also have contributed to CASA's general confinement to the central office and to counseling tasks in particular. Teachers at Site A seem to take for granted that the functions of counselors and the functions of classroom teachers are generally quite separate. Thus, some teachers seem to feel that teachers need no more information about students to perform their roles. As one put it after hearing Sirotnik's explanation of the project in the small group meetings (Note #3 above):

> I don't claim to understand all this but it seems idealistic. This is going to be a great tool for counselors, but I don't see how I can use it as a teacher.

What is more, teachers on more than one occasion have expressed frustration with the operations of the counseling office. Near the very outset of the working-group meeting described above in Note #1, for instance, as teachers were voicing some of their information needs off-the-cuff, one teacher said:

> Let's get specific here. There's some things going on in the counseling office that are just very hard to understand. For instance, I teach social psychology, which is supposed to be a required course. But there is a procedure to waive the requirement. I'm interested in whether the kids who're having it waived aren't the ones who really need that course. How can I get that information? I assume they have it in counseling, but how can I get it? Then, I get kids who're actually in the class who're on the waiver list...

This remark set off a chain of anecdotes from other faculty in the working group about anomalies in course assignments and counseling decisions. The episode only concluded when the original speaker quoted above suggested that an information system should "kick out anything unusual, like the IRS computer does with tax returns, because obviously they're not doing this down there [in the counseling office]." To this, there was general agreement in the group.

These and similar events indicate that in Site A's informal social structure, a boundary that is only semi-permeable marks off teachers and their concerns from counselors and theirs. This boundary, it appears, is reinforced by some strong teacher feelings about the quality of counselors' work. In the experience of this author, such a boundary is hardly unique to Site A; similar divisions exist in many American high schools. Nevertheless, its apparent presence at Site A may well have truncated the teacher- counselor communication through which information about CASA and its benefits might otherwise have been shared. The informal networks for such communication seem to be absent, and many teachers appear to believe that what is good for counselors is not necessarily advantageous for teachers.

This analysis of the history and current status of Site A's current information system provides some insights into the social milieu that surrounds the development of systemic evaluation at Site A. Principally, it should make clear that despite the existence of a relatively sophisticated information system at Site A, most Site A staff are neither enthusiastic nor sophisticated about instructional information or information systems. Furthermore, it should help to demonstrate that the social-organizational structures implicit in the systemic evaluation model described earlier have not yet been built at Site A.

Viewed in broader perspective, the account in this section begins to show that for all practical purposes, there is nothing special about the current status of information and information use at Site A. Most districts and schools do much less than they could with the evaluation and assessment data they have on hand (e.g., Bank & Williams, 1981; Dorr-Bremme, Herman & Doherty, 1983). Those that routinely and systematically link it with instructional planning or school improvement are the exceptions.

The next section of this paper explores how teachers at Site A think about information and their information needs under these, very usual, curcumstances. It also suggests how some of Site A's organizational arrangements support these ways of thinking.

The Clinical Perspective and School Social Organization

The concept of systemic evaluation that is generally guiding the Site A reality test (as outlined above, pages 6 to 7) places considerable emphasis on the social uses of information.

Information use by individual teachers and others is certainly included as part of the evaluation and renewal process. Nevertheless, information is viewed expecially as a "catalyst for evaluative discourse and action" (Sirotnik, Burstein, & Thomas, 1983, p. 4). The renewal process is construed as "systematic and rigorous deliberation over any and all information seen to be potentially relevant to school improvement" (p. 35). Such statements as these not only call attention to the importance of the social uses of information in the systemic evaluation model; they also reflect its commitment to a holistic renewal process. The school is viewed here as a cultural/ ecological system. Its parts are conceived to be interdependent. Thus, it is ideally the entire system upon which renewal efforts focus. This means that information use toward renewal is necessarily a social process, in which all relevant actors engage.

Especially in light of these ideals, it is important to note that Site A teachers do not routinely or easily think of information in terms of its social uses. Rather, they tend to approach information and their information needs from a clinical perspective.

Two hallmarks of the clinical perspective, according to sociologists of applied knowledge, are its orientation toward action and its emphasis upon the individual case. Elaborating on these points, Homans (1950) explained:

> Clinical science is what a doctor uses at his patient's bedside. There, the doctor cannot afford to leave out of account anything in the patient's condition that he can see or test. It may be the clue to the complex... In action we must always be clinical. Analytic science is for understanding but not for action.

Noting with Homans that the aim of the clinical practitioner "is not knowledge but action," Friedson (1970) adds that "the clinician is prone in time to trust his own personal first-hand experience" and to be "particularistic," stressing the uniqueness of each case to be treated. The "clinical rationality," Friedson (1970, p. 171) concludes, "is particularized and technical: it is a method of sorting the enormous mass of concrete data confronting [the practitioner] in individual cases."

It is the clinical orientation as defined here that characterizes the thinking of Site A teachers participating in the systemic evaluation reality test. Their central interest is particularistic. They want to know primarily about "this student" or (secondarily) "this class"; rarely do they manifest spontaneous interest in knowing about the students in "this school," or even those in a given department or program. They require that information be relevant to action, recurrently asking "What can I do with that?" and declining to gather information because "I can't do anything with it." In particular, they seek information that supplements, and helps them sort and clarify, the plethora of personal, first-hand information they gain about particular students and class groups as they interact with them.

The project to date has gathered a wealth of data to substantiate these generalizations. Only a small portion of it will be reviewed here.

NOTE #4 (Febrary 22, 1984) . Leigh Burstein (UCLA) has opened this first meeting to discuss "what information you'd like to have available" by underscoring the many levels at which data can be aggregated to address needs of different types. He mentions "information for or on specific programs" and calls attention to the importance of data for "constant monitoring at the school level -- course enrollments, drop out rates." He expands on his belief that information at the school level can help in the "planning and design, in studying the impact of new programs you want to start... In my view

this is what an information system should do." Two hours pass and the group takes a break. Up to now, none of the teachers mentioned anything except information they'd like to have on their individual students and classes. The assistant principal, in a brief comment, has expressed interest in "a graph that makes attendence very visible, that would show the match with time of day, day of week, neighborhood grid. This would help in working on attendence with neighborhood organizations and elementary schools.

The group returns from the break and continues to discuss information on individual students and classes. As the 3:30 p.m. time for drawing the meeting to a close arrives, Burstein again encourages the Site A participants to consider "measuring school climate issues" and the "on-going monitoring" functions of a comprehensive evaluation system. He assigns each working-group member to come into the next meeting with a list of questions or issues (1) the kinds of things [information] you need for your students, classes, departments and so on or; (2) the kinds of things you'd want to collect at the school level on an on-going basis." The meeting ends with no further discussion of school-level information.

Despite considerable prompting to consider other levels of data, then, teachers in this initial meeting framed their discussion of information needs exclusively in clinical terms. Their interest were in data on individual students and particular classes. And despite Burstein's assignment in preparation for the next meeting a week later, that meeting too focused almost exclusively on clinical information needs.

NOTE #5 (February 29 1984). The meeting opens with a discussion of the foreign language teacher's list of desired information. (Refer to Note #2 for context.) The list focusses on individual student characteristics. Ken Sirotnik (UCLA) then asks for other ideas.
Social Studies Teacher: "I was talking to the people in my department, and the most important thing people want to be able to do is to see what their class is like, so they can group kids for cooperative learning, so they don't assign work that's beyond the kids' level, things like that."
Ken Sirotnik: "There's not some other information that you, as a teacher, think is more valuable...?"
Social Studies Teacher: "Sure, there's lots of information that's valuable. And sure, I can wait for the class to begin and see the kids work, and then I get that information. But what they want, what we want is for the beginning of the semester, when you don't know your kids yet."
Sirotnik: "Would they want students' GPA [grade point average] in the general area?"
Social Studies Teacher: "No, people didn't want to get that specific. What you need to know is what level are kids reading at? What are their comprehension skills? How well can they write?"

English Teacher: "Yeah, just a rough picture. You can modify it once you start working with them."
Assistant Principal: "You wouldn't want their GPA in the general area, as Ken was suggesting?"
Social Studies Teacher: "No, but I'd like to have their grades in particular English classes. That alerts me to the kinds of success they have. It tells me not only how well they're doing but the kinds of strengths and weaknesses."

A few moments later, the foreign language and social studies teachers turn to explaining some of the value of background data on idividual students.

Social Studies Teacher: "What we need is information that lets us respond to the kid who says, when you give them the assignment, 'I can't read five pages.' you want to be able to go to your list [a single page with information on each student in the class] and say, 'That's not what this tells me. You're reading scores show you can do this...'"
Foreign Language Teacher: "Right. 'And it says here [gesturing to imaginary information sheet] you have no job; you're in a college prep program, so I don't see a problem.'"

Still further on in the meeting, UCLA staff try to turn discussion away from information on individual students and classes and toward consideration of school-level data needs. Sirotnik, for instance, argues that information on students' preferred "learning methods and strategies" would need to be "content-free if it's to be useful schoolwide." Three teachers immediately respond that (as one put it) "you can't ignore the subject matter if this is going to help us plan our classes." Burstein suggests that you could bank questions on instructional practices as part of an on-going effort to track "the health of the school." As an example of such questions, he points to a Study Of Schooling survey the group is using as a stimulus for ideas. The agree-disagree questions listed there include such items as "The teacher gives me too much work to do in this class"; "Students know the goals of this class"; and "The teacher tells us how to correct mistakes in our work." Burstein explains that these could be asked about "the teachers in this school in general," instead of about particular teachers in particular classes, as in the original. Site A teachers reply that this information would be seen as "too threatening" if gathered about individual teachers and that "it wouldn't be useful to anyone" if students answered about teachers in general. Teachers fears are discussed, and the meeting ultimately ends with no further discussion of school- or program-level information.

These transactions demonstrate the persistence of teachers' clinical thinking. As in Note #4 above, the Site A teachers in the working-group and the colleagues with whom they spoke simply could not independently generate suggestions for data that would be worthwhile at the school level. Here too it is evident that they want

information that can help them make sense of and respond to individual cases: information for planning their class; information for responding to the student who says "I can't read five pages"; and so on. Furthermore, they want this particularistic information at the beginning of the semester. Once teaching and learning are under way, they will have additional information on students from their own experiences with them. This information will allow them (as one teacher maintains) to "modify" the general view of the individual learner that they can obtain from test-score and GPA data. Thus, the clinicians' tendency to trust personal, first-hand knowledge comes through, as well, in these conversational exchanges.

The clinician's action orientation is evident in all the above, but it is especially apparent in the following.

NOTE #6 (April 3, 1984). The group is working its way through student attitude surveys originally used in the Study Of Schooling research, selecting items and issues that seem likely to generate useful information that can be tied to the District's huge data file. About twenty minutes have gone by when the group turns to a set of agree-disagree questions headed, "Relation to Other Students." Among the six items are such statements as "I'm popular with kids my own age" and "It's hard for me to make friends." Introducing their consideration, Ken Sirotnik (UCLA) explains that they "cluster to yield a score which you could call 'self-concept toward others.'" A debate erupts about who would use this information. The foreign language and health teachers maintain they're not interested. "I wouldn't have any need for that," says the former. Leigh Burstein (UCLA) argues that this data could shed light on the school-wide attendence problems "you've all been concerned with." He also notes it could be used in an on-going monitoring of the health and climate of the school. Ken Sirotnik adds, "The question here may be not so much what you're going to do with this in your class, but what's a whole faculty going to do if they find many students have a low self-concept, there's attendence problems at the same time. Shouldn't they know that?"
Health Teacher: "Look, what I'm saying is who uses this? If I were starting a school, I might want know this, but who is there right now?"
Social Studies Teacher: "I think the counselors might want it. I'd want it if I were a counselor."
Foreign Language Teacher: Even though I didn't choose these, I have no objection to asking them.

Math Dept. Chair: "You could use this for longitudinal monitoring, though, like Leigh has said, couldn't you?"
Burstein: "I hope so."
Health Teacher: "That seems like we're just collecting information for the sake of collecting information."
English Teacher: "No, I think this could really help with the 'Track A' kids, in confluent education. I'd want to know how my students feel about themselves."
Discussion passes on without a consensus.

Soon attention turns to a set of questions that elicit students' view of the quality of the school's "physical plant." Everyone agrees this is within the administration's purview. The issue of whether to include these is resolved when one teacher says, "Let [the assistant principal] and [the principal] decide if they want it."

Near the end of the meeting, a set of questions about why students elect the classes they do is examined. Several teachers point out that since the school administration has just made decision to limit students' choice of classes, this information is irrelevant. "We can't do anything about this," the social studies teacher reasons. Burstein again raises the importance of considering the value of this information in a longitudinal sense," but the teachers end up rejecting the items as useless.

As noted above, the views expressed in this excerpt highlight the action orientation of the clinical perspective, as manifested in the concerns of Site A teachers. Together with the other field notes excerpted and transcribed here, this helps to document that Site A teachers do indeed approach information and their information needs from the clinical perspective.

There is nothing especially surprising in this finding. Teachers across the nation seem to adopt a clinical stance in seeking, interpreting, and using data about students (e.g., Dorr-Bremme, 1983). Nevertheless, the account presented here suggests that a substantial gap exists between teachers' routine ways of thinking about information, on the one hand, and, on the other, the way systemic evaluation principles posit that they should. This gap is currently an important part of the context in the development of systemic evaluation at Site A. What is more, if the national data just referenced are accurate, it promises to be a key contextual factor in many schools and districts.

While Site A teachers perspective on information is a particular kind of perspective (a clinical one), it also has certain generic features. Like members of other organizations, teachers at Site A are interested in information that has "theoretical or practical import for organizationally relevant purposes and routines" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 191). It simply happens that, given the social organization of Site A, the only organizationally relevant purposes and routines for teachers there are clinical in nature, i.e., taking action toward individual students and class groups. At present, the school maintains no regular organizational structures that bring staff members together and empower them to discuss and resolve common concerns.

As most high schools in the United States are, Site A is organized into various academic departments. Department meetings occur, but they apparently do not consitute settings for dialogue and conjoint decision making. When Burstein suggested that some type of survey data might help departments plan their curricular emphases, faculty in the working group rejected the notion immediately. One teacher explained that "everyone sort of sidesteps disagreements over teaching methods and philosophy and things" during department meetings. Another added that departments meet infrequently and usually deal only with what courses individual members of the department want to teach, what books they want to order, and similar routine tasks. In another working group session, Burstein asked whether "your departments" could use information on students' perceptions of instructional practices. After some initial confusion

about what Burstein had in mind (several Site A participants asked in apparent disbelief, "Why?" and "For what?!"), one teacher answered, "No, this would be seen as threatening." The matter rested there.

Site A, as noted in passng earlier, participates in the California School Improvement Program (SIP). SIP guidelines require schools to assemble a school site council which includes the principal and elected representatives of various constituencies: teachers, other staff (e.g., counselors, non-certified personnel), parents and other community members, and students. According to SIP provisions, the site council has responsibility for assessing schoolwide needs, developing improvement objectives, planning activities to meet them, and evaluating the results of these efforts. SIP Schools are encouraged to engage in comprehensive planning and to use the planning process as a catalyst to or motivator for dialogue and involvement. Some schools do so, but many treat the planning process merely as a hurdle that must be jumped in order to procure additional state monies (Dorr-Bremme, et al., 1979). Site A seems to fall in the latter category. Several discussions of Site A's SIP program during working-group sessions suggested that a few administrative leaders have primary responsibility for SIP plans. Thus, the SIP site council does not appear to provide a forum for substantial teacher involvement in schoolwide planning and decision making. Similarly, other Site A instruction-related programs (the Career Magnet Schools and Learning Resource Center programs, for instance) appear to be the artifacts and concern of a few key administrators.

More generally, role boundaries are relatively well defined at Site A. Teachers teach; counselors advise students, help them plan their programs, and deal with special problems; administrators set policy and concern themselves with schoolwide issues. That faculty members currently tend to accept and cooperate in sustaining these boundaries should be evident in some of the remarks quoted earlier. (Teachers referred the decisions on whether to gather certain student attitude data to counselors and administrators, for example. See Note #6.)

It is not the case, then, that teachers are simply predisposed to see information and their information needs from a clinical viewpoint. Their clinical perspective is in fact supported by the organizational arrangements within which they operate each day. Those arrangements provide no occasion for using information socially; they generate no need to consult school-level information. Thus, when teachers consider the marginal utility of new information -- when they implicitly and explicitly address the common organizational question, "Will it have been worth the cost to gather this data?" -- the criteria they employ and the decisions they make reflect the practical contingencies and exigencies they face on the job (c.f., Dorr-Bremme, 1983; Garfinkel, 1967). They can use additional information to operate clinically in the classroom. They cannot use information for anything else.

It follows from this analysis that Site A's organizational structure is every bit as important a contextual influence in the development of systemic evaluation there as teachers' clinical perspective is. Indeed, this analysis suggests that the two are interdependent. Other CSE/UCLA research supports this view. In

studies of testing-evaluation-instruction linkage systems in school districts, Bank and Williams (1983) found that organizational supports for information use and teachers' attitudes toward information tend to evolve together and be mutually supporting.

Faculty - District Relations: Conflict and Trust

The current status of the CASA information system, teachers' clinical perspective on information, and the organizational arrangements that help sustain the latter are aspects of the school context that have already begun to influence the systemic evaluation field test at Site A. Now, attention turns to contextual factors which promise to influence the field test in the immediate future. One of these, discussed in this section, is the demeanor of the faculty at large toward the evolving systemic evaluation innovation.

Recall that to date only a small number of Site A faculty and administrative staff members (the working group) have been intimately involved with the project. The remainder of the faculty has participated only tangentially in two ways. First, they attended small group meetings during which the systemic evaluation project's history and goals were described. (See Note #3 above.) Second, they administered a student survey during one class period.

Soon, however, the faculty and staff at large will begin to play a much more important role in the project. On November 7, they will attend a three hour faculty meeting devoted exclusively to the

systemic evaluation project. During that meeting, they will review and react to the "Student-At-A-Glance" and "Class-At-A-Glance" forms developed by the Site A - UCLA working group. They will also examine four key student-survey findings incorporated on the "School-At-A-Glance" reporting form and begin to consider whether these merit schoolwide action. (These forms are described above on pages 8 and 9.) A teacher survey will be administered later in the year. And, assuming continued District support, all teachers will receive Student-At-A- Glance and Class-At-A-Glance data for each of their classes at the beginning of the second semester in the present school year. Faculty reactions to the systemic evaluation project as a whole will soon become extremely influential in the course the project takes. The responses of teachers throughout the school will also, of course, contribute significantly to the learnings that the reality test has been designed to engender.

Under these circumstances, it is especially important to ask, "What is the present outlook of the faculty? How are they now inclined to view activities of the type that systemic evaluation, as developed at Site A, is likely to entail for them?"

With respect to the kinds of information teachers in general are most likely to find interesting and relevant, there is every reason to believe that viewpoints of faculty members in the working group are likely to be broadly representative. This is also true of the formats in which they are most likely to find that information appealing and useful. As noted earlier, working-group teachers have tried to speak, at least in part, for the faculty at large. On at least one occasion,

they elicited the views of others in their departments (see Note #5 above). Thus, the particularistic, clinically oriented information presented in the concise, Student-At-A- Glance and Class-At-A-Glance forms seem to be reasonable "first draft" products to offer the faculty as a whole for their review.

At the same time, however, working-group teachers recurrently caution that their perspectives are not shared by all faculty members. Some, they point out, have no interest at all in survey information on students' feelings and viewpoints. As one teacher explained during a working group session:

> I'm interested in what students like to do in class and what methods work best for them, but I don't think all faculty would be interested in this. Many of them would say, "when the bell rings, I'm going to close that door and teach what I want to and the way I want to based on what I think is best.

On another occasion, during a working-group discussion on the value of gathering data on students' views of teachers' helpfulness, a different member of the working group opined, "There aren't probably ten people throughout the school at this time who care anything about that."

Even such "hard" data as test scores showing students' reading level and writing ability, teachers in the working group warn, is not of universal relevance.

> If I were to ask the question, how many teachers will use this, I'd have to say, well a small number. You've got to remember there are 93 teachers out there and in some areas -- in PE, horticulture, and some others -- they don't concern themselves with this stuff.

In short, working group teachers emphasize, as one might expect, that every faculty member will not be interested in a given type of information about students and some may not be interested in any student information at all.

But the particular information preferences of Site A teachers are less important, at this point in the project's development, than their general stance toward the project and its data collection and reporting activities. To engage in dialogue with UCLA staff and Site A working group members, to be willing to give the project their time, Site A faculty and staff must first believe that some kind of data collection and reporting activity can be worthwhile. Put another way, they must be more-or-less convinced that the benefits of a project such as this one can be worth the costs -- the time and energy they will have to invest in it. It appears that at present not all Site A's professional staff are.

During their initial introduction to the project in small-group meetings on May 23, 1984, a notable minority of teachers voiced doubts that benefits would come from the systemic evaluation effort. Such doubts seem reasonable in light of the experiences they report, as the following quotations from participants in the May meetings reveal.

- There were four surveys already this year. We never saw the results of any of them.

- When [the new principal] was here [for a visit] last spring, he gave us a questionnaire. Has anyone seen the results of that?

- You'll find your facing a negative atmosphere here. The teachers have been "statistized" to death. This [student questionaire] is just one more survey. There has been no follow up from the district on any of them yet.

- We gather a great deal of useless information here already... As long as the teachers is powerless to act on the information about students, then it all just disappears in quicksand. It's more frustrating than anything else if you can't do anything with it.

- I know you [UCLA people] need this for your professional careers; it's nothing personal, but many teachers have had too much of ed. school people who do research and then run off and give boring lectures. And who does it help?

While these remarks explicitly express skepticism about the benefits of any data collection enterprise, implicitly they also reveal concerns about costs. As yet another Site A teacher explained during the May 23 meetings:

> It's not just you, but you're one of 900 separate projects with demands... We've had Students Against Drunk Driving, substance and drug abuse projects, and each one got their time in my class.

Still others who spoke up in the small-group meetings worried that the data would be invalid, negative, and bad for the faculty. "You're going to get automatic reponses on this," one explained to the UCLA speakers. "The majority of kids will respond in very negative ways that they may not really feel." Said another, referencing changes in school policy and procedures under the new principal, "This is a year of change and it's a bad time of the year, too. It guarantees negatives." Yet another argued:

> We have a history of being told the results of everything in a way that points out our weaknesses. The kids have just been taking tests, and regardless of the results, they'll find fault with us somehow. What they'll say about our way of giving tests will be negative.

"If this gets out," warned still another teacher, "it's going to just be more fodder for the press to condemn us with."

Working-group teachers, who participated in the May small-group sessions with their colleagues, attempted to put all these negative initial reactions in context for the UCLA staff. Faculty morale at Site A, they explained, was very low in general. More specifically, working group teachers went on, many teachers were afraid that the data would be used against them. Recent events in the District were at the root of all this, they added.

It seems that during the 1982-83 school year, the Valley Unified School District felt impelled to reduce the number of faculty it employed districtwide. Even some tenured teachers had to be let go. Teachers found the Districts "riffing" (or reduction in force) procedures highly unfair. Within-district transfers that accompanied the staff reduction, they maintained, resulted in teacher assignments "that make no logical sense."

Part of the "riffing" process involved the use of information. According to one teacher, the 153 district faculty members listed for possible lay-off,

> were all checked out. They [District officials] were looking at projector use. They figured that teachers who were showing a lot of films weren't teaching. They considered people's academic qualifications to teach subjects, their classroom control, anything that would justify cutting them. So all this [student survey] information -- well, there's some specific feelings of mistrust.

Later on, in the 1983-84 school year, contract negotiations between the local teachers' association and the District reached impasse. Teachers felt not only that the District's firm salary offer

was unsatisfactory, but it was extremely unreasonable. This situation aggravated the wounds opened by the reduction in force, leaving teachers feeling beleagured and unsupported. Problems that might otherwise have been interpreted by teachers as petty, bureaucratic inefficiencies came to be viewed as evidence of the District's disregard for their professional status and needs.

Whether all the comments quoted above reflected this state of affairs is problematic. It is probably reasonable to assume that some did, as the working-group teachers maintained. Furthermore, other faculty members' comments in the May 23 meetings made these links explicit.

NOTE #7 (May 23, 1984). The Period 2 small-group session is under way. Ken Sirotnik (UCLA) has explained the project's aims and elicited reactions. Many are negative.
Social Studies Teacher: "Part of the reaction you'll be seeing all day lies in the fact that we're in the classroom, we need supplies, materials, support of this kind and we're not getting it. Administrators are going off to meetings, intellectualizing about new educational ideas, but we can't get what we need to do our jobs."
English Teacher: "I have a college prep class, British Literature. There are books we need to read, which I ordered ages ago. They haven't arrived on time. How am I supposed to teach literature without books?"
Social Studies Teacher: "The anthro. books I ordered in September for this semester haven't arrived yet."
Second Social Studies Teacher: The same thing has happened with my global geography text. There are the problems we face, the practical day-to-day things. What am I going to do with more information?
English Teacher: You're dealing with a very embittered staff. There's conflict between the teachers and the Hill [the District office]. Teachers here have been mistreated."
Later, in the sixth period session, a teacher echoed these themes. "Why should we get excited about information systems, "he asked rhetorically, "when the District can't even order me my books. This [student survey] will just tax an already over-taxed system."

By rough count, 68 Site A faculty and professional staff members attended the six small group sessions held on May 23 to introduce the systemic evaluation project and its student survey. Thirty three

(about 48%) took the floor to address their group and UCLA participants in particular. And of those 33 who spoke, 19 (roughly 57% of the speakers and 28% of the staff in attendence) articulated one or more negative comments of the types quoted above. Nine others asked questions that can be construed as neutral in tone, e.g., "Are there standard procedures for administering [the student survey]?"; "What should we do if the student doesn't know his CMS [Career Magnet School]?"; "When will you have the results back?" The remaining five speakers (including two members of Site A - UCLA working group) offered comments which can be interpreted as positive toward or supportive of the project in general or the student survey in particular, e.g., "Some of these questions look interesting"; "I can vouch for Ken [Sirotnik of UCLA]; I've worked with him before. He'll follow through."

These simple counts should help to put the discussion in this section -- and the demeanor of those at Site A toward the project -- into clearer perspective. Initial responses toward the project were universally enthusiastic. Faculty attitudes toward systemic evaluation activities are, apparently, mixed. Previous experiences have generated skepticism about the value of data collection, as well as resentment toward yet another activity that takes time away from the central business of teaching and learning. The District administration and its creations (and this project can be interpreted as one by Site A staff) are viewed with antipathy and suspicion by many. All of this provides a challenge for the development of systemic evaluation at Site A. It is a challenge that can be met only in part by

presenting the faculty and staff with relevant information at relevant times in appropriate formats. Equally important, if not in fact more fundamental, is building an environment of greater trust and cooperation in a social system where mistrust and antagonism have recently been more common.

While this section has focused upon the initial attitudes of Site A faculty toward the systemic evaluation project and its reality test activities, it has shown some connections that appear to exist between those attitudes and the doings of the District administration. The next section examines the role of District leaders more explicitly and cites some reasons why their role is important in a school-based innovation.

The Nature of District Support for the UCLA-Site A Project

The last section began by suggesting that teachers' demeanor toward reality-test activities is one contextual feature that bears on the future of systemic evaluation at Site A High School. The nature of the District administration's support is another. In order to understand the present status of that support and what it portends for the project, however, a bit of background is necessary. Thus, the discussion below opens with a brief review of the school and District commitment to the systemic evaluation reality test. Then, it moves on to consider how and why the District's commitment to the project is likely to impinge upon systemic evaluation's future at Site A.

The systemic evaluation reality test has had consistent, strong support from the Site A administration. The new principal (who assumed his position in September of 1983 and is now in his second year) appears to be enthusiastic about the project's potential. He has taken the lead in securing release time for working-group teachers to participate in the project. He agreed to devote class time to the student survey and has scheduled the planned, three hour faculty meeting to examine the "At-A-Glance" reporting forms and survey results. Despite a very busy schedule, he has attended all but one or two working-group meetings and several meetings among UCLA staff and personnel in the District office. Furthermore, he has expressed interest in the student survey findings, made suggestions for how they can be useful schoolwide, and cited them in support of several policies and decisions. The principal also has committed himself to involving the faculty as a whole in examining andacting on schoolwide issues that project data help to make evident. All of this demonstrates his continuing support for the development of systemic evaluation at Site A.

The assistant principal who championed the CASA system and acts as a member of the working-group is another key figure in the school administration's commitment to the project. A second assistant principal has become increasingly interested in systemic evaluation activities through recent months.

In its commitment to project activities, the school administration has been generally reinforced by administrators at the District level. The Superintendent of the Valley Unified School

District involved it in a network of schools usually called The Partnership, sponsored by the UCLA Laboratory in School and Community Relations. It was through Partnership connections that the Valley District and Site A were identified as promising settings for the systemic evaluation reality test. The systemic evaluation concept appealed to the Superintendent, and he welcomed the project.

The District's Assistant Superintendent for Instructional and Support Services is the Superintendent's designated contact for project issues. He has said on several occasions that building a comprehensive instructional information system "is something I've always wanted to do." With the Assistant Superintendent's approval, release time from the classroom for working-group teachers has been made possible, student surveys have been printed, survey data have been tabulated, and the District's information on students have been make available to UCLA staff. His approval of these activities testifies to District interest in and support of the systemic evaluation idea and reality-test activities.

As the 1983-84 school year ended, the Assistant Superintendent affirmed the District's continuing "commitment" to the project. Ratifying that commitment, he promised approval of extra pay for teachers to join in a two-day working-group meeting in September of 1984, just before the official opening of the new school year.

There is reason to believe that the Assistant Superintendent's interest in the systemic evaluation effort is more than nominal. During a meeting on September 27, 1984 to review project progress and

products (the "At-A-Glance" forms and student survey data), he expressed enthusiasm with the forms. He became involved in an animated discussion of survey findings. He also suggested other, school-level data that would be helpful to the District and to school counselors. When the head of District data processing suggested that some of this information was already available, the Assistant Superintendent replied:

> I know you have it but the problem is to get it into a form like this, a form that's easy to read!

He then went on enthusiastically to suggest various ways in which project designs and concepts could be adopted by the District for its information needs.

The District's data processing personnel were equally affirmative in their reactions to the "At-A-Glance" forms and the information they contained. The director of the data processing unit, who often worries aloud about his need to keep information and produce information and produce reports "that nobody really wants," commented:

> The thing you [UCLA] guys did was go out and find what people wanted. That's what's important... This is, this is a pretty nice report!

He added that the junior-high-school counselors "would like this" and was soon immersed in a discussion of the techical prerequisites for producing the At-A-Glance reports on a routine basis.

Thus, key District personnel have manifested genuine interest in the substance and products of the joint Site A - UCLA project. They have commented with some enthusiasm on their potential for wider use in the District. Together with their limited-but-important financial

support (for survey duplication, data processing time, and substitutes to release working-group teachers from their classroom), this interest promises on-going commitment to the reality test, if not to systemic evaluation itself.

Other events, however, blur the portrait of District support painted so far. First, the Assistant Superintendent equivocated on his commitment of extra pay for working-group teachers to attend the planned, early-September meetings. According to the Site A principal, he suggested in early August that the funds for this extra pay could come from a special state grant the school was hoping to win, but added that "we'll find some way" to compensate them for their additional work time. Later in August, a phone call to the principal revealed that the Associate Superintendent had not yet formally agreed to such compensation. The principal delayed inviting teachers to the two-day September meeting pending a District commitment to compensation. Plans to expand the number of teachers in the working group were also delayed. In yet another phone call to the principal three days before the scheduled meeting in September, he reported, "I don't know about compensation. I think we have some money here in the school that will cover [the teachers'] lunch." Ultimately, the meeting took place, but for four hours instead of the scheduled two days. The working-group was not enlarged; only the administrators and four of the five faculty members who had been working with the group all along attended. Given the ambiguity surrounding the compensation issues, it seemed inappropriate to increase the group's size or to ask

teachers to donate more of their time in the days just before school opened. The state grant application (mentioned above) was not successful. No District funds were forthcoming.

Second, during the September 27, 1984 meeting cited earlier, the Assistant Superintendent maintained that "there's no extra money" for various District office work in support of systemic evaluation. UCLA staff and the Site A principal had explained their interest in developing and administering a teacher survey, using District data programmers to produce "Students-At-A-Glance " (and possibly "Class-At-A-Glance") forms for all Site A teachers' second semester classes, and continuing working-group meetings with ten faculty members rather than the present five. The Assistant Superintendent was most concerned, in the absence of "extra money," about the costs of release time for teachers and the level of effort District data programmers would need to invest. "My feeling is," he said, "we've invested time in this and we should go the next step, but we can't omit the fact that we don't have a lot of bucks." In the end, the Associate Superintendent requested the director of data processing to give him "an ideal of how much time this will take. If it's two months of two programmers' time, maybe we can't do it." He also directed the Site A principal "to come up with an estimate of the release time" for teachers that the project would require through the 1984-85 school year. "I'd like to go to the Cabinet with the whole package, but I need to tell them what it would cost."

These time-cost estimates were subsequently provided, but by mid-October no response from the Assistant Superintendent on any of these matters had been received at Site A or UCLA.

Third, the ambiguous nature of District support for the project demonstrated by these events may be part of a larger pattern. In the veiw of several persons with whom UCLA project participants have spoken, the District administration has a tendency to let schools do whatever they wish, but to drop projects once the extra District monies or outside funds for those school-initiated projects are gone.

In overview, then, District support continued to be quite solid through the 1983-84 school year. As the 1984-85 year opened and UCLA staff made a tactical decision to encourage the District to assume greater responsibility for systemic evaluation, however, the nature and extent of that support became less clear.

The foregoing account should demonstrate that a districts' support for a school-level innovation is subject to on-going negotiation. As circumstances at the district level evolve, priorities change; new demands on district resources arise. Earlier "commitments" to particular projects need to be re-examined by district administrators in light of changing circumstances. At the same time, school personnel cannot always specify in advance exactly what a development project will require in terms of district support. UCLA participants were careful to detail what, in general, the project would require of the Valley Unified School District and Site A. Release time for teachers throughout the reality test was mentioned. So, too, were data processing time and clerical support (for duplicating surveys, etc.). But until longer-term plans and particular data

collection and reporting procedures emerged from the developmental process, no one could say with precision just how many teachers would need to be released from class assignments for how many hours, how many pages would need to be duplicated by what deadlines, or how many District programmers would need to work for how long in support of the project. Thus, just as changing District political and economic circumstances open the door to renegotiation of levels of support for a given innovation, so too does the evolution of needs at the school level in any formative or developmental project. There is nothing especially unusual, then, in the sequence of events described above.

Considered in broader perspective, the nature of District support is likely to be a key contextual factor in the long-term maintenance of systemic evaluation at Site A.* The support and collaboration of both school and district leadership tends to be critical in the maintenance of innovative educational programs (e.g., Berman & McLaughlin, 1977). This holds true when the innovation in question is an instructional information system. Bank and Williams (1981, 1983), for instance, have studied a small number of school districts that have made unusual advances in linking testing and evaluation data with instructional planning and decision making. In none of these cases

*In the short run, UCLA resources through the Center for the Study of Evaluation from the National Institute of Education and from the Laboratory in School and Community Relations will sustain the reality test. Of course, the project's development activities will probably need to be adjusted if the District provides no financial support. There is, however, every likelihood that Valley will continue to bear the costs of at least some reality-test activities.

was the mere presence of relevant and readily utilizable information sufficient in itself to sustain the links or guarantee the information's use. In every district studied, there were one or two idea champions at the district level who took the lead in sustaining the linkage system. Each district devoted considerable resources to structures that supported the system. Most maintained on-going staff development which helped teachers learn how to interpret and act on the available information in their everyday activities. All created (or capitalized upon extant) organizational arrangements within which school personnel were empowered to use the information in making choices among alternative educational policies and practices. In short, these exemplary districts reified their commitment to and support of instructional information systems by institutionalizing them in a network of mutually interdependent and mutually sustaining activities carried out collaboratively in both school and district settings.

Now, the systemic evaluation effort differs from those studied by Bank and Williams. The latter were district generated and districtwide in scope; implementation moved "top down," from district office to the schools. In contrast, the joint UCLA-Site A project tests a school-based, "ground-up" approach to the development of information systems. At the school level, some of the functions Bank and Williams identified as components of successful instructional information systems have begun to emerge. While UCLA participants were the original idea champions, the Site A principal, an assistant principal, and the cadre of working-group teachers have begun to

assume that function. (They have enthusiastically taken responsibility for the upcoming faculty meeting to present the project and its products to the entire staff, for instance.) Through working-group sessions, they have begun to learn how to think about information and its uses in instructional planning and decision making.

Nevertheless, it seems likely that the Valley Unified School District will need to take at least some steps along the path marked out by Bank and Williams' findings if Site A is to maintain whatever information system UCLA helps the school develop. As noted in the last section, teachers at Site A are skeptical about the value of information. They define their relationship with the District administration as one of conflict, rather than collaboration. Thus, it seems unlikely that Site A faculty will give their time and energy to systemic evaluation without guarantees of District support. Furthermore, as the role of UCLA personnel gradually changes from one of initiation and leadership to one of support and study, the District's commitment will become more critical. Even though Site A working-group members may assume leadership, they will need help and guidance from the District office. They will need, at a minimum, the resources required for data collection, processing, and reporting in relevant formats. They will also need time to consider and discuss school-level data; to act on it in ways they deem appropriate for school renewal; and to review, revise and (thus) maintain their information system. They will also need problem-solving advice on technical and social organizational issues. All of this, it now

seems, will have to come directly or indirectly from the District office. Given the District administration's history and present ambiguous demeanor, it remains problematic how much of this support the District will choose to provide.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed four key social contextual issues that have emerged during the early phases of the joint UCLA-Site A systemic evaluation project:

(1) The current status of the Valley-Site A information system (CASA);

(2) Site A High teachers' clinical perspective on information and features of the school's social organization;

(3) Faculty-district relations as they impinge on the development of systemic evaluation at Site A; and

(4) The nature of District support for the UCLA-Site A "reality test" and what it portends for the future.

In documenting and describing each of these issues, the paper has been a progress report, not an account of case study findings. Nevertheless, it has suggested at appropriate points that the phenomena observed during the reality test thus far are at least similar to those found in other schools and school districts. The "under-utilization" of extant information is not unique to Site A, nor are the circumstances which appear to have led to the restricted use of CASA. Clinical thinking about information is sustained by the atomistic nature of Site A's organizational structure, but many

comprehensive high schools share this structure and a clinical perspective toward student information is widespread. Bad experiences with information -- experiences in which the time-and-effort costs far exceed discernible benefits -- are common in schools. So too are instances of District-faculty conflict and mistrust generated by contract negotiations and reductions in staff. Policy changes and vacillations in District support for schools' projects are usual, not extraordinary. Any "ground up" school-based information system, then, is likely to encounter such issues in the course of its development. As this paper has illustrated, such systems do not succeed or fail by virtue of their independent merit: on the basis of their quality of convenience or relevance alone. Rather, an information system and its social context are interdependent in dynamic, ecological balance. The social organizational arrangements of the school and district shape and sustain (or fail to sustain) the information system; and it, in turn, helps to shape and sustain (or fail to sustain) the arrangements of the school and district. It is the nature and features of this process which the systemic evaluation project hopes to identify and learn from as the reality test proceeds.

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